

# The lynching of Fritz Knoechlein

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By Richard Landwehr – My thanks go to the administrator of the ["Hidden Heroes" at archive.org](https://www.hiddenheroes.org).

In October 1948, Fritz Knoechlein stood trial in the town of Altona in the British occupied zone of Germany. He was accused of organizing a massacre of British prisoners of war in Le Paradis, France, in May 1940. The judge and jury were British Army officers; the trial was conducted under the premise that the victors had the right to dispense justice as they saw fit. There was no international recognition for such a procedure; on the contrary, previous international conferences had tried to ban the practice of such "ad hoc" procedures. The defendant and several prosecution witnesses were mercilessly tortured by the British authorities. Although little hard evidence could be found linking the defendant to his "crime," the final verdict was never in doubt. Fritz Knoechlein was hanged as a "war criminal" in January 1949. As it later emerged, the British Army had committed the same crimes of which Knoechlein was accused, at the same time and in the same place. Furthermore, the British admittedly violated numerous provisions of the Geneva Convention in the Dunkirk battle area in May 1940.

As recently revealed through declassified British documents, the British soldiers defending Dunkirk committed a series of criminal acts against both German soldiers and French and Belgian civilians. Some of the British soldiers were given illegal "dum-dum" ammunition (a fact vehemently disputed during the Knoechlein trial), and they were under orders not to take prisoners unless they were needed for interrogation. That's why the British soldiers feared that they too could be shot if they fell into the hands of the Germans. And this appears to have been the case in two different cases in Le Paradis and Wormhout. At these two locations, some captured British soldiers were executed in retaliation for the massacre of a large number of soldiers from the SS "Totenkopf" division. [For further details see: "[The Miracle of Dunkirk Reconsidered](#)" by Charles Lutton in the Winter 1981 issue of the Journal for Historical Review.] ...

must be said that the British Authorities were never really interested in prosecuting the Germans for the shootings in Le Paradis and Wormhout, simply because doing so could have exposed their own evil deeds. The fact that the Le Paradis incident became public at all was largely due to the press, first in France and then in Britain, and the efforts of one of the "survivors". The [Wormhout affair](#) was kept under wraps for 30 years and no effort was made to bring people to justice for it. But when, following public pressure, it was decided to bring a trial against Le Paradis, the British military authorities ensured that the cards were completely reshuffled from the start.

According to the official account, on the afternoon of May 27, 1940, a company of the 1st Battalion/SS "Totenkopf" Infantry Regiment 2/SS "Totenkopf" Division accepted the surrender of part of the British Royal Regiment in the town of Le Paradis. 99 of the British soldiers were then brought before a machine gun squad and all but 2 were killed. The 2 "miracle survivors" (there were always survivors in German "massacres"), both of whom were wounded, were later treated by German medics and became normal prisoners of war. They later served as key prosecution witnesses in the trial of Fritz Knoechlein, although both

had difficulty identifying him. One had been addicted to alcohol for a long time (even while serving in France!) and the other suffered from mental disorders.

In late 1946, after the story appeared in the newspapers, the British War Crimes Investigation Board set to work to solve the Le Paradis story. Its mission was twofold: 1) to find someone to blame for the "crime" and 2) to ensure a careful cover-up of all British war crimes. Using captured files from the German Army, the relevant "Totenkopf" regiment and battalion were quickly located, but the work of finding the right culprit was initially difficult as most of the company commanders were long dead from fighting had fallen. After searching through the Waffen-SS prisoners who were still in Allied captivity (the Waffen-SS prisoners were held captive for many years after the surrender! Btl/SS "T" Rgt. 2 was located). He was, of course, Ostuf Fritz Knoechlein. Since Knoechlein was the only surviving company commander of this battalion who had served in France in 1940, he was automatically held responsible for the shooting in Le Paradis. Of course, this "honor" also came with a death sentence !

Fritz Knoechlein's military career was impeccable. As a recruit in the SS-Verfügungstruppe in the 1930s, he served as a platoon leader in the SS-Standarte "Deutschland" until his transfer to the newly formed SS-Division "Totenkopf" in 1939. Several Authors of "Atrocities" blamed the influence of "concentration camps" for Knoechlein's "deeds" at Le Paradis, but in truth he had never seen the inside of a camp.

Knoechlein had also graduated from the SS Junker School "Braunschwig" in 1935 and therefore had excellent military leadership qualities. From 1939 to 1941 he served as a company commander in the Totenkopf Division with the rank of Hauptsturmführer and from 1942 to 1944 as a battalion commander in the Totenkopf and Reichsführer SS Divisions with the rank of Sturmbannführer (Major). In April 1944 he took command of the SS Panzergrenadier Regiment 24 "Norge" with the rank of Obersturmbannführer and led the regiment with endurance and courage through the fighting on the Narva Front. He was awarded the Iron Cross 1st Class in 1940, the German Cross in Gold in 1942 and the Knight's Cross in November 1944. During his military service with the Waffen-SS, he had received nothing but praise from his commanding officers for the manner in which he had carried out his duties. If he had a flaw, it was that he wasn't particularly close to his subordinates and was far from the "father figure" that many commanding officers became to their men.

There were some problems with the selection of Knoechlein as the main villain; one of which was that his company lacked the heavy machine guns needed to carry out the alleged act. Only the 4th Company of the 1st Battalion had these weapons. This meant that the 4th Company, at least on paper, had to be subordinate to Knoechlein, even though he was not its commander! In the world of Allied ex post facto justice, this little formality was simply thrown out of the way.

Although there appears to have been a shooting of British prisoners at Le Paradis, estimates of the number of those shot vary between 30 and over 100. It is possible that the final count included many battlefield deaths; at this point no one will know for sure. There is no doubt that fierce fighting took place at Le Paradis; the British soldiers had been ordered to hold out at all costs. Thanks to declassified documents, we now know that the English used "dum-dum" bullets as well as shooting prisoners. The "dum-dum" ammunition used was reported

at the division and regimental headquarters of the "Totenkopf" division at the time. In addition, the regiment's orderly officer reported that he witnessed the British gunning down stretcher bearers as they tended to the wounded. The documents show that the SS "T" Regiment 2 lost over 200 dead and missing on May 27th alone – an enormous number – and that many of the bodies had either been shot in the back or showed signs of "execution." " had.

The village of Le Paradis was captured in the late afternoon of May 27, 1940 by the SS-"T"-Rgt. 2 was taken, and on that day there were no reports of mass shootings of British prisoners, nor was Fritz Knoechlein's name ever mentioned in this context. After pleading "not guilty" at his arraignment on August 28, 1948, Knoechlein was put on trial for his life on October 11, 1948. The press from both "free" and communist countries were there; the latter journalists were particularly interested in propagating the trial.

Knöchlein's defender, Dr. Uhde, was literally in the dark because most of the documents and information he needed for his case were withheld from him. The British War Office refused to cooperate with him for good reason, and the British judge took sole responsibility for deciding what information was "relevant" to the defense. The popular British press was shamelessly used to spread an endless stream of lurid reports condemning Knoechlein.

On the first day of the trial, one of the British survivors of Le Paradis embarrassed the prosecution by not being able to clearly identify Knoechlein. This prompted the judge presiding over the trial to have Knoechlein walk around in an SS uniform to support the witness! The witness had other problems with his testimony and blamed them on his long hospital stay. Before the trial began, the witness had already been shown Knoechlein, but he couldn't remember him well. Then things got even worse for the prosecution.

A French woman who owned a farm in Le Paradis described being threatened at the time of the shootings in Le Paradis by an SS officer in a peaked cap, with facial twitches, carrying a large revolver and speaking broken French. After a dramatic and completely irrelevant statement, she theatrically identified Knoechlein as that SS officer. The author who chronicled the events of the trial had the audacity to claim that: "She obviously didn't know where to look for the defendant." The defendant was sitting in the dock at this point, with two large armed guards on either side! You would have had to be completely blind not to notice him. In addition, all of the woman's descriptions of Knoechlein did not correspond to the truth!

Defense counsel was able to elicit the following points from the woman: a) she was suffering from a "head disease" at the time of the alleged events, b) she had memory problems, and c) the officer who threatened her had a cheek twitching problem (a condition that... Bone never had!). The woman had apparently been interrogated by German soldiers in 1940 for harboring British soldiers after the end of hostilities, and was released unharmed.

The next step for the prosecution was to call former SS men (in British captivity) as witnesses. The first of these witnesses, Emil Stuerzbecher, a former adjutant of the 1st Battalion/SS "T" Regiment 2, gave a lengthy statement that directly implicated Knoechlein in the shooting. Stuerzbecher's statements have since become the mainstay of "atrocities"

authors, but any objective examination reveals them to be incredibly ridiculous. Here is his version of a conversation with the commander of the 1st Battalion, SS-Standartenführer Heinz Bertling: Bertling on the line: "*The stories that are circulating are correct. There was terrible mess in Company No. 3. Knoechlein is a villain and a show-off, but not a soldier. He even claims he is right. Nothing like this has ever happened in the World War and the whole thing arises from the Führer's crazy ideas. In any case, this piggy trick is ruining my day's success.*"

Staff. Berling was later appointed SS general. According to all the "Atrocities" authors, the SS "Totenkopf" division was "ideologically pure" and anyone who said anything bad about the Führer was cashiered on the spot. Of course, this brief comment attributed to Bertling did not take place, but was the product of one of Stuerzbecher's "interrogation sessions"! In fact, the entire statement was "coached" by Stuerzbecher; it has absolutely no connection to reality as we know it today. Also note that Company 4 mentioned above - and not Company 3 (Knuckles) - had the heavy machine guns that supposedly fired the shots!

The crux of Stuerzbecker's testimony was the remark that he had "doubts about the authenticity of these (dum-dum) bullets" that had been picked up throughout the battalion area. There is no doubt that the "Dum-Dum" bullets were real, but for the purposes of this "kangaroo [mock] court," Stuerzbecher was under instructions not to take them into account. The prosecution's next two witnesses gave similarly damning accounts of the shooting. They saw Knoechlein at the scene, but could not explain how he managed to commandeer a machine gun section of the 4th Company. They also followed their interrogator's instructions about the alleged British use of "dum-dum" bullets, etc. A third witness confessed that he was the section commander of the machine guns that had done the dirty work, but as luck would have it, he was At the time of the shooting he had just been replaced by another non-commissioned officer who was later killed in action. The defense attorney was able to elicit a tacit admission from this witness, Theodor Emke, that he had been beaten during his interrogations. The prosecutor immediately tried to stop this train of thought! After some harassment, which both the prosecutor and the judge added with hidden meanings, the witness came back into line.

On October 15, the prosecution called the second "survivor" (William O'Callaghan – the first survivor was Albert Pooley) to the stand. Having been shown photos of Fritz Knoechlein beforehand, O'Callaghan was able to easily pick him out from a row in the courtroom. Unfortunately for the prosecution, O'Callaghan's description of the German officer who ordered the execution at Le Paradis did not match Knoechlein's. In his preliminary report, O'Callaghan gave Knoechlein a hooked nose (not true), a peaked cap (not true) and red cuffs (not true). This witness's entire appearance proved to be a further embarrassment to the prosecution.

Another German witness followed who contributed little to the story. The prosecution introduced a series of alleged original documents from captured German files that confirmed that some kind of shooting of British prisoners probably took place in the Le Paradis sector on May 27, 1940. The following document was only published in an edited version because it referred to a possible shooting of German prisoners by the British:

### **Document 3.**

To the XVI. Army Corps: Command Post/SS "T" Inf. Rgt. 2 – May 29, 1940, 10:55 a.m. The British used dum-dum bullets, which was proven by our own wounded and by the statements of our own officers. A swastika flag was also displayed, which lured our soldiers out of cover, whereupon they were wiped out by ambush machine gun fire. The result in Malo: 4 officers, 153 non-commissioned officers and men were killed. 18 officers, 483 non-commissioned officers and men were wounded.

Most of the wounds were to the back... (at this point the Judge Advocate ended the report!). Another 52 non-commissioned officers and men were reported missing, but they were certainly killed, most of them - as we now know - in captivity!

On October 18, Knoechlein voluntarily took the witness stand in his own defense and testified in English and German. He described in detail his battalion's combat operations on May 26 and 27, 1940, near the La Basse Canal, and reported several instances that he had either heard of or witnessed in which the British had failed to "to fight according to the laws and customs of war as laid down in the Geneva Convention". He claimed that the site of the alleged massacre was in the sector of the 2nd Company, which conducted most of the fighting for the town of Le Paradis, and not in his sector of the 3rd Company. He claimed that he only learned of the shooting on May 28, when he attended a conference at the regiment's headquarters in Bailleul. His own opinion on the shooting at Le Paradis was that it was probably a spontaneous outburst by the men embittered by the inhumane methods of the British. Knoechlein had no alibi for his whereabouts between 1:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. on May 27, 1940 (the alleged time of the shooting), other than that he was with the first platoon of his company, first near the intersection of Le Paradis and then stayed east of the town.

At the regimental conference in Bailleul on May 28th, reports on the British "Dum-Dum" ammunition were distributed and samples were examined. Knoechlein denied having worn a peaked cap at Le Paradis (as the French woman and O'Callaghan claimed), as this item of clothing had to be left behind far back in the motor transport park of the SS "T" Division. There is no doubt that Knoechlein was telling the truth on this point. During the battles in France he wore only a steel helmet and/or a soft field cap, and the photos confirm this.

Knoechlein also mentioned that he was wearing a camouflaged jacket, which made it difficult to distinguish him from a soldier. The prosecution witnesses all missed this, but here too he was undoubtedly right. Testimony then revolved around his alleged facial twitches (which he never had), his inability to speak a word of French at the time, and the fact that his service revolver never left its holster. Knoechlein then picked apart the absurd statements of some prosecution witnesses.

Then the prosecutor took over and tried to get Knoechlein to recant his testimony about the "illegal British methods," including the "dum-dum" bullets. Knoechlein refused to do this, and 33 years later his statement was fully confirmed! The prosecutor was so helpless to "make any points" that he next tried to give Knoechlein the "facial twitch" that the Frenchwoman had attributed to him in that absurd little "question": Prosecutor: *"If you're pretty excited, you have a little nervous twitch on your face, don't you?"* Knoechlein: *"I've never noticed that, and neither have my relatives."*

Needless to say, no such feature was noted in any observation of Knoechlein in court! Next, an unsuccessful attempt was made to give Knoechlein a silver peaked cap in the combat zone, but here too the prosecutor was unsuccessful. In a discussion of the movements of Knoechlein's 3rd Company, the prosecutor noted that the company had only come within 600 meters of the massacre site, and even at that point the company was clearly moving past. She did not bivouack in Le Paradis. In the end, the prosecutor tried again to get Knoechlein to deny the "dumdum" stories, and this type of questioning continued into the next day. He answered fully and accurately and at no time gave any basis for the prosecution's claims that the use of such ammunition was unlikely. Knoechlein was thoroughly exonerated in this regard, but it showed the British's interest in covering up their grievances through a kind of ridicule, for at that point no one in the Allied camp gave credence to the idea that their "noble" soldiers could have done such things !

On October 19, 1948, Knoechlein spent more time describing the British "dum-dum" ammunition to the judge. Then two defense witnesses who had served in Knoechlein's 3rd Company during the fighting at Le Paradis were called to the stand. The first witness, Walter Fripes, was a private in the second platoon of the 3rd Company. He described the fighting on May 27 as very hard and mentioned the fact that all the prisoners the company had taken at Le Cornet Malo were immediately sent to the rear. He testified that he had handled British "dum-dum" ammunition and provided a report about it to the platoon commander. He also noted that the 3rd Company did not reach Le Paradis church until 5 p.m. (or four hours after the shooting) and that Knoechlein was wearing either a steel helmet or a soft forage cap that day. Fripes noted that the company had been instructed on the proper handling of prisoners and that there had never been an order " *not to take prisoners* ." He first heard of the shooting when the company reached Bailleul.

The second witness, Franz Backwinkel, also a private in the same platoon, more or less repeated Fripe's statement and also confirmed the British use of "dum-dum" bullets. On the next day of the trial, October 21, Captain Charles William Long, adjutant of the 2nd Battalion, Royal Norfolk Regiment (the unit that allegedly suffered the massacre), testified for the defense. He testified that he and about 30 other soldiers in the battalion had been treated "extremely well" by the members of the SS "Totenkopf" company who had captured them; they had even let them run around unguarded to collect British wounded. Captain Long put his battalion's surrender at Le Paradis at 5 p.m. on May 27, just a few hours after the massacre that witnesses said took place. The statement was certainly damaging to the British position, although he also denied the use of "dum-dum" ammunition by the battalion's soldiers.

Previously, on October 19, Fritz Knoechlein made an important statement in court that bears repeating: " *I want the court to know that I was a professional contract soldier with many years of experience. I have always been trained to take responsibility. None of my officers or non-commissioned officers were concerned in this matter.* " Knoechlein was probably aware that he was a condemned man from the start, and with this bold statement (which was entirely in keeping with his character) he hoped to ensure that at least none of his subordinates would go to the gallows with him!

On October 22nd, Knoechlein gave his testimony that he had been tortured along with his comrades in the "London cage", after which the prosecution spent the whole day defaming

his character and behavior and once again using the famous "stupid" Dum" balls came into play. The next day, October 23rd, Dr. Uhde, Knoechlein's defense attorney, makes his closing argument before the court. His first points are worth repeating:

*" The main accusation against my client is quite clear. But the authorities are trying to find a person responsible for this crime, and the only person they can find who is sufficiently incriminated is my client. Firstly, I would like to point out that this happened eight and a half years ago. Second, most of my witnesses are either dead or untraceable. "*

*" ...I submit that the prosecution has not proven that the defendant was responsible for the shooting, only that he was present in the village where it took place. They also haven't proven that he knew about the shooting but didn't prevent it. Even if both of these points are answered in the affirmative, the question remains: Was the shooting lawful for some reason? "*

Regarding the last point, we now know that the British massacre of the SS Totenkopf prisoners was the trigger for the shooting of Le Paradis. Had a field trial been conducted alleging that the British had acted as "irregulars" by their action, a retaliatory shooting would have been legally (perhaps not morally) justified.

The defense then tried to prove that Knoechlein was not present at the shooting. In a damning speech, he tore apart the testimony of the prosecution witnesses, pointing out in particular that they were unable to identify Knoechlein and that they assigned him all sorts of strange uniforms and physical characteristics. He also noted that the timing given for the shooting was impossible as British hostilities did not cease until hours later. His closing remarks were as follows:

*" What [Captain] Long said is most remarkable. He spoke of the overall impeccable treatment and gave facts that make it even more certain that the defendant was not there at the time. "*

*" My client Knoechlein had hoped for a trial before a military court in order to clear his name of the shameful accusations against him. I have proven that he was awarded the Iron Cross 1st and 2nd Class for the fighting in May 1940 . I hardly believe that he would have received these awards if he had committed an irregular act. "*

*" Before I close, a word needs to be said about British fighting methods. I have the impression that the "dumdum" ammunition and the white flag incidents [at one point near Le Paradis some British soldiers ambushed some SS soldiers after they pretended to surrender with a white flag] , took place... In this case it would have been possible to court-martial the guilty British prisoners. If a court had been held, the German officer who passed the sentence would not have been criminally liable. We know that a group of officers and sergeants were present at the scene of the shooting. It cannot be denied or refuted that these men were court-martialed, but if a German court-martial had sentenced the British prisoners to death for a violation of international law, the presence of these German soldiers at the shooting would not have been a war crime. "*

*" I would like to return to what I have already said, namely, asking the court to declare the defendant 'not guilty' because he was neither present nor involved in the shooting of the British prisoners of war. "*

If you read all of his statements, one can only come to the conclusion that the defense attorney, Dr. Uhde, did the best possible job under the circumstances. It should also not be forgotten that the Allies shot German prisoners if they believed they had violated international law. The fall of Otto Skorzeny's commandos in the Ardennes in December 1944 is just one example of this.

The prosecution's closing argument was simply a "pull through to get the job done" and contains nothing worth quoting. The prosecutor simply tried to prove that a) British prisoners were shot at Le Paradis, b) it was a war crime, and c) the defendant (Knoechlein) was there and thus either "ordered the massacre" or the guilty of "omission". It didn't matter which charge was true, Knoechlein would be hanged either way!

On October 25, 1948, the judge presiding over the trial, somewhat dissatisfied with the ineptitude of the prosecution, explained to the panel/jury of British military officers why Knoechlein was guilty! He made it clear that he considered possible British provocations [such as the "Dum-Dum" ammunition] to be irrelevant. It is somewhat unusual for the administrator of the "trial" to present such a one-sided and biased report against the defendant, but he wanted to be absolutely sure that no mistake was made: Knoechlein must hang!

After a very brief recess, the jury returned the expected guilty verdict, to the surprise of no one except Knoechlein's wife, who was present. The defense now had the right to call character witnesses to avert the death penalty. The first witness was the former SS Obergruppenführer Karl Wolff, who had commanded all Waffen-SS units in Italy. Wolff had known Knoechlein since 1933, a year before he joined the SS. The survey went as follows:

Dr. Uhde: "*What impression did you get from Knoechlein?*"

Wolff: "*He was a nice young man. He knew how to behave in public and was popular and a good companion.*"

Dr. Uhde: "*What was his character like as a soldier?*"

Wolff: "*When I asked, he was an officer who put his heart and soul into his work. I've never heard anything negative about Knoechlein. I only heard that he was a brave soldier and commander.*" [Wolff was later subjected to numerous "war crimes" trials and spent the rest of his life in Allied prisons].

The next character witness was the former Standartenführer Otto Wilhelm Kron, who, as a regimental commander in the "Totenkopf" division, was one of Knoechlein's direct subordinates. He noted that Knoechlein was one of his best officers and that he was very careful and above reproach in his behavior. At every hearing, Kron denied that anyone in Knoechlein's units had ever violated the rights of prisoners of war. Kron died not long after the trial under mysterious circumstances in Dachau at the age of 38. Two more witnesses testified on Knoechlein's behalf, and the last, Günter Putze, mentioned that Knoechlein had used his own staff vehicle to treat wounded prisoners of war in the Anzio area of Italy.

Of course, what the witnesses had to say was irrelevant to this trial; Knoechlein was a dead



man from the start. But it was important for the witnesses mentioned above because they continued to be harassed for years by the Allied occupation authorities for testifying. Their treatment helped reduce the number of defense witnesses willing to testify in later "war crimes" trials!

Knoechlein was then sentenced to "death by hanging" and the sentence was carried out on January 28, 1949. As usual, he behaved with complete dignity and courage until the end. The British authorities, moral hypocrites all, had gotten their "pound of flesh."

After years of studying the matter, this author is of the opinion that Fritz Knoechlein was only guilty because he was the only company commander in his battalion in France to survive the war in 1940! At no time could it be proven that he conspired or directly ordered the execution of the British prisoners. Some German eyewitnesses had seen him at the scene of the shooting, but they could not say with certainty that he gave the fatal orders. Furthermore, all of the German prosecution witnesses had been tortured and beaten by the British during their interrogations, and their statements were highly suspicious, to say the least.

It can be said that a shooting of some British prisoners at Le Paradis took place in direct retaliation for similar British actions. The soldiers responsible for this shooting came from the 4th Company/I. Btl./SS "T" Inf.Rgt.3 and not from Knöchlein's own 3rd company. The company commander of the 4th Company, Hauptsturmführer Schroedel, was present at the scene of the shootings, and only he could have given the order for the machine gunners of the 4th Company to open fire. It is possible that Knoechlein was at the scene, but his responsibility for what happened can never be fully determined. According to British logic, he deserved to die because he might have been in the area and thus participated in the crime. But of course the people running the trial made sure that all the blame was shifted to Knoechlein. Interestingly, the majority of survivors from Knoechlein's own 3rd Company believed that he probably bore sole responsibility for the shooting, but a minority of survivors vehemently disagreed. In any case, none of them admit to having been there and all their opinions therefore come from either rumor or hearsay.

Unfortunately, the documents that would have proven British guilt in the war crimes against the "Totenkopf" Division were deliberately withheld from Knoechlein's defense, although, as already mentioned several times, they are available today. Had this evidence been presented at Knoechlein's trial, it is difficult to imagine how the trial could have resulted in a guilty verdict for the defendant. In any case, we must again note that Knoechlein was consistently misidentified by the main witnesses, that his company was not involved in the shooting and that he had no authority over the 4th company, which carried out the shooting. Had the battalion commander been incapacitated (which was not the case), Knoechlein would have had command of the 4th Company in his position as senior company commander/deputy battalion commander, but that never happened.

Nothing in Knoechlein's service record indicates that he ever acted contrary to the law or authority. Because of his proven military prowess, he quickly rose in rank and leadership position. The fact that he was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross also testifies to his good character. During his captivity, Knoechlein vehemently protested his innocence in the shootings in Le Paradis to his fellow prisoners. This author fully supports this

conclusion. A brave and superior officer, who still had much to accomplish, was deliberately sacrificed to 1) incite the British public and 2) help cover up the British misdeeds and crimes in the defense of Dunkirk.

From the perspective of 35 years in the future, I think it is high time to tear off the mask of hypocrisy from the "Le Paradis Massacre." Fritz Knoechlein's name should be cleared of taking sole blame for the incident. That's the least honest historians can do!

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We invite you to read the "authorized" account of the trial of Fritz Knoechlein in the book: "*The Vengeance of Private Pooley*" by Cyril Jolly. The text was printed in Great Britain in 1956 and seemed convincing enough to the East German communists at the time to produce a translated edition of this work as an example of how a good "anti-fascist" trial should work! In retrospect, the book seems downright ridiculous and hypocritical in places, considering how such trials took place and what the British forces did at Dunkirk. It can be said that parts of the book are quite fair and that, from today's perspective, Fritz Knoechlein is a much more sympathetic figure than Mr. Jolly originally intended.

To emphasize some of the points made in the article, the author thought it useful to quote from Nicholas Harman's detailed work *Dunkirk: The Patriotic Myth*.

On the question of the "dum-dum" ammunition, which was found by the Germans but denied and ridiculed by the British at Knoechlein's "trial", comes this quote from Harman: ... "

*Turnbull had better reasons to worry. In my revolver I had eight cartridges, two of them soft-nosed, a warrant for my immediate execution if I were captured with them in my possession. Soft-nosed dumdum bullets were banned by the Geneva Convention on the Rules of War.* " (p. 88)

Page 98 describes a major massacre carried out by men of the Durham Light Infantry on May 21, 1940. The records were later falsified, but at least 400 German soldiers were slaughtered in British captivity that day, many of them from the SS "Totenkopf" division.

That was just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. On page 230, a soldier in the Coldstream Guards, James Langley, provides this information: "*He recalled the strict orders given to all platoon commanders in the Coldstream Guards: take no prisoners unless specifically ordered to do so. Interrogations are needed.*" The same orders appear to have been issued to most of the British units defending the Dunkirk area. According to Harman and recently released military records, British troops in Flanders murdered civilians on the slightest pretext, carried out mass executions of suspected "fifth columnists," and looted to their hearts' content.

Who were the real "war criminals" in France in May 1940? In any case, Fritz Knoechlein was not the perpetrator of a "war crime", but the victim of one!